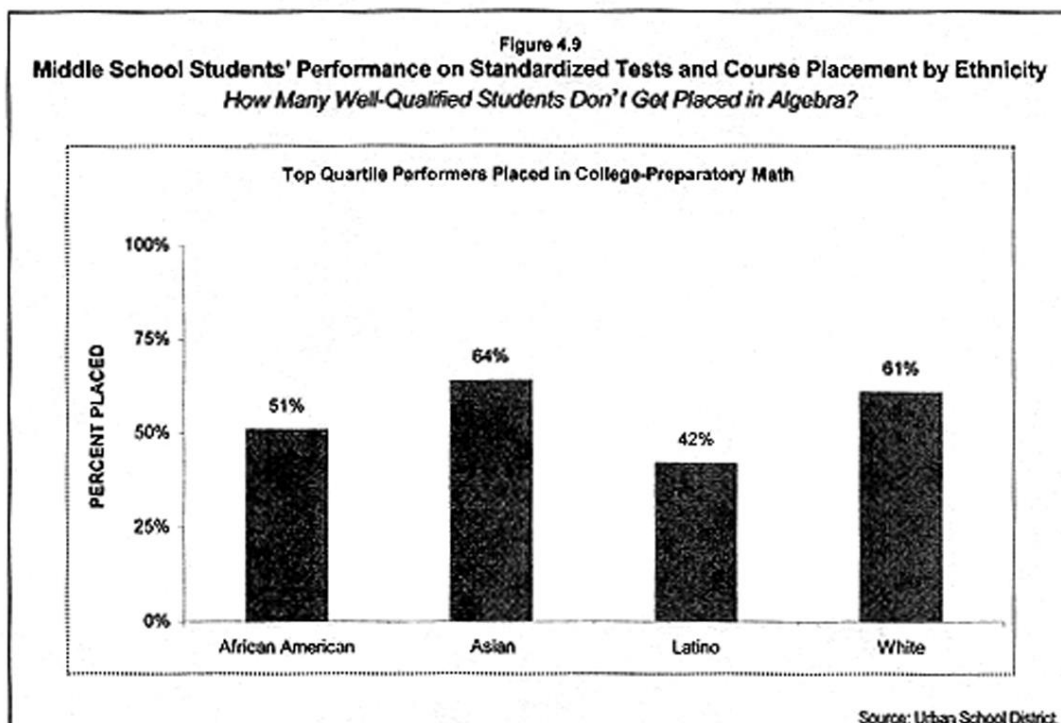


EXCERPT FROM *SETTING OUR SIGHTS: MEASURING EQUITY IN SCHOOL CHANGE**

How Many Well-Qualified Students Don't Get Placed in Algebra? When middle school personnel are asked about the reasons for the disproportionately low enrollment of African American and Latino students in courses like algebra that would prepare them for college, they typically respond that placement is based on test scores. They believe their system is bias-free and based on merit. But an examination of actual school practices reveals interesting differences. For example, in one school district, a look at algebra placements for students who scored in the top quartile of standardized mathematics tests revealed very different placement practices for different groups. Proportionally, Asian and White students had higher placement rates than African American or Latino students, even when achievement on tests indicated that the placements should be similar. The educators in the district were most startled by these data because they exposed systemic biases. Use of these data, as represented in Figure 4.9, helped to accelerate changes in practices.

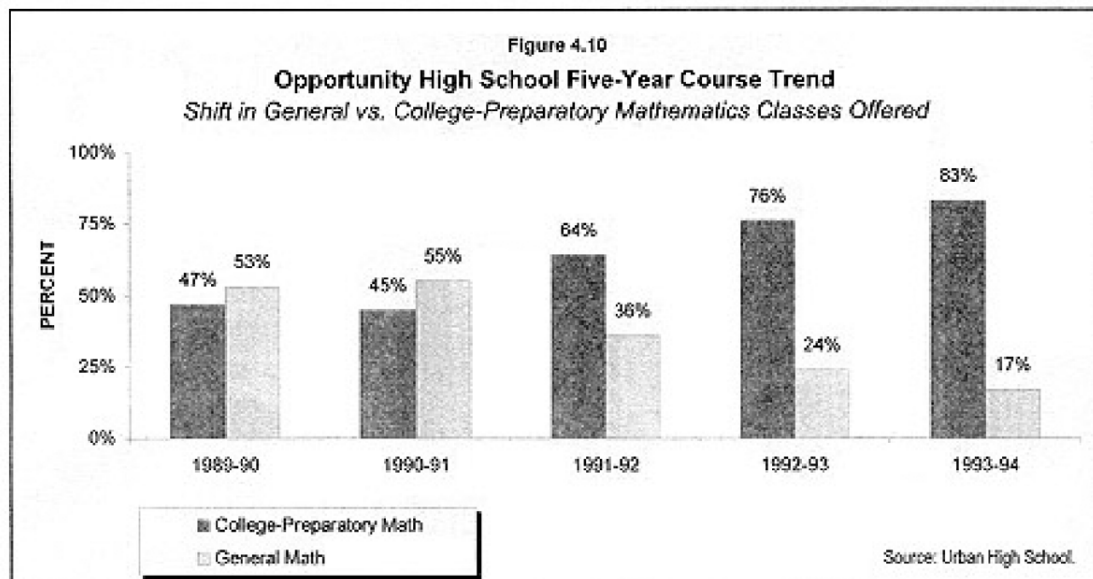


* Excerpted from Johnson, R. S. (1996). *Setting our sights: Measuring equity in school change* (pp. 58–61). Los Angeles: The Achievement Council. Copyright 1996 by Ruth S. Johnson. Used with permission.

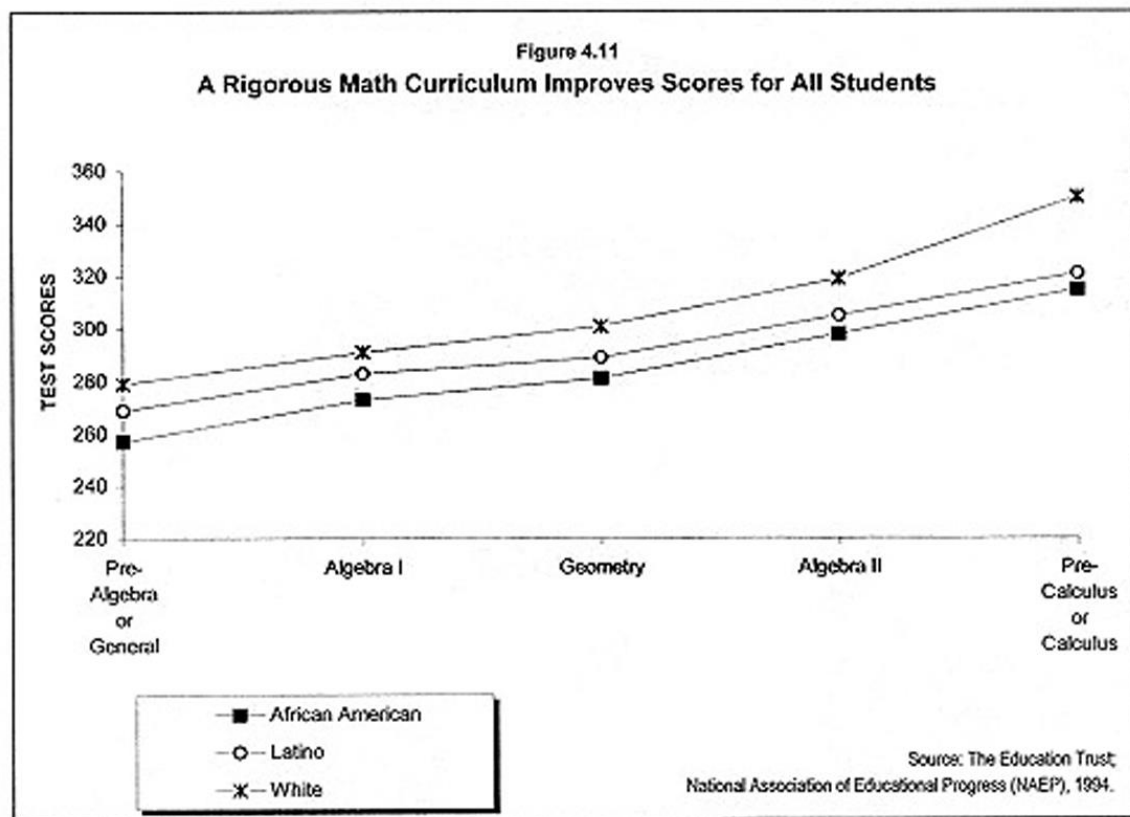
CHANGING PRACTICES AND ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS

Around the country there are schools and districts that are proving that their patterns can be changed—that low-income and minority students can achieve at high levels when they are targeted at high levels. Data from these schools are critically important in convincing educators and community members that change is possible. Here are several examples.

Opportunity High School Five-Year Course Trend. The data in Figure 4.10 describe changes over five years in an urban high school mathematics department that purposely began offering algebra to all of its predominantly low-income African American student body. This was prompted by a district thrust and several different improvement initiatives. A group inside Opportunity High School that felt a very high level of dissatisfaction with current outcomes took on the challenge of change, led by a committed principal. As the data show, this school changed the status quo. They then took the initiative beyond algebra to increase the levels of enrollment in other college-preparatory courses. Over a five-year period, the school's mathematics department dramatically increased the number of college-preparatory mathematics courses from 47% to 83%. These data challenge naysayers who don't believe that these kinds of changes are possible with the described student population. In addition, this underscores that *fundamental changes often occur over a period of time rather than instantaneously.*



A Rigorous Math Curriculum Improves Scores for All Students. Figure 4.11 shows a clear and simple story: regardless of race, students who are afforded the opportunity to study higher-level math score higher on the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) math test. With the completion of each math level, from general math to calculus, students' test scores rise incrementally. Why not offer all students the chance to succeed in higher-level math courses? This information was taken from the National Association of Educational Progress 1992 "Mathematics Trends Assessment," *Trends in Academic Progress*, Department of Education, 1994.



What Happens When Opportunities are Opened Up for More Students to Take College-Preparatory Courses? Figure 4.12 makes a powerful case for all students to have access to higher-level courses and for educators to challenge systems that lock students out of these courses. This multiethnic urban district made a concerted effort to dramatically increase the opportunities for students to take Regents-level science courses. For all racial/ethnic groups, the numbers of students that *passed* in 1994 well exceeded the numbers who were even *enrolled* in 1993.

